

Shiva worship

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सुपुत्र
suputra
son

पूजा
pooja
worship

फूल
phool
flowers

Sangram Singh ruled the kingdom of Mewar, centred in Udaipur, from 1710–34. Mewar was one of the most important and powerful of the Hindu Rajput kingdoms, located in the region now forming the modern state of Rajasthan, which formed part of the Mughal Empire of north India. The rulers of these kingdoms were considered both temporal and spiritual leaders and held the office of priest-kings. The maharanas acted as Diwan (Prime Minister) of the god Eklingji, the four-faced *linga* form of the Hindu god Shiva, and their common title was Ekling-ka-Diwan. Eklingji had been the ruling deity of Mewar since the eighth century, and the association of the Maharana and his kingdom with Hindu belief helped define their Rajput identity within the Islamic Mughal empire.

Rajput paintings documented the activities and personalities of the court. As well as depictions of formal religious events and festivals, the maharanas also commissioned paintings recording more intimate scenes of worship, as shown in this example. Sangram Singh is accompanied by one of his sons as they worship Shiva in the form of a *linga* at an outdoor shrine. Beneath a pipal tree the black stone *linga* (an aniconic or non figural form of the god, usually pillar shaped) is covered with offerings of flowers, and a small figure of the god stands within a niche in the tree trunk. On a raised platform the Maharana and his son greet a priest clad in a *dhoti* and wearing a *rudraksha* (a rosary of the seeds of the *rudraksha* tree, identified with Shiva). On his forehead the *tripundra* (three horizontal lines) is visible. This mark is the identification of a devotee of Shiva. Also visible on the platform is a small figure of Nandi, Shiva's bull, offerings of food, and vessels which may contain milk, ghee or water to be poured over the *linga* during worship.

The Maharana and his son are dressed in *angarakha* (tunics) richly decorated with gold motifs, pearl earrings, and gold *pag* (turbans). The Maharana's turban is embellished with a feather ornament, possibly a *kalgi*, which was a style made from black heron feathers that was reserved for members of the royal family. The Maharana also wears a gold patterned *patka* (sash) and is armed with a sword and shield. In front of the platform a group of retainers accompany a palanquin with a rolled canopy, and at the left a servant holds the Maharana's hookah.

This type of painting was created in the palace studio, where artists, scribes, bookbinders and paint preparators were employed by the Maharana to record his reign in image and text. Images were first drawn in fine charcoal or ink on thick handmade paper (*wasli*) and then painted in natural pigments. The colours were made from mineral and plant pigments (for example, blue from ground lapis lazuli, green from copper minerals) which were ground, dried and mixed with a binder, usually a plant gum. The paint was applied in layers, each layer burnished with a smooth stone, (for example, polished agate). The burnishing makes the paint surface very smooth and dense, and this richness is a characteristic of Rajput paintings. Brushes were made in various thicknesses from a range of animal hairs (for example, squirrel to horse hair). Gold paint, made from ground gold mixed with a binder, was used lavishly on paintings at the richest courts, less wealthy clients used less gold. Silver and tin were also used, especially to depict lakes and rivers. The works were not mounted and framed for display on the palace walls, but stored in cloth wrapped bundles until they were requested for viewing by small gatherings of invited guests of the Maharana or a member of his family.

INDIAN
*Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son
at a Shiva shrine*
c. 1715, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India
opaque watercolour and gold paint
on paper
32.0 x 21.4 cm (image)
Felton Bequest, 1980 (AS83-1980)

